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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Famine Emergency Committee

The Crisis Is Today

Talk by Chester C. Davis, chairman, Famine Emergency Committee, speaking from Louisville, Ky., over NBC network, Friday night, April 12, 1946, 10:45 EST.

(For Release at 10:45 p.m., EST)

Today, April 12, 1946, has been the most critical day in history so far as feeding the people of the world is concerned. Tomorrow will be even more critical, and the next day still more so. The gravity of the food situation in most of the countries of Europe will increase with the passing of every day until summer, when the first crops of 1946 can be harvested. And the first harvesting of crops in Europe will begin only the gradual easing of the tense and painful hunger to which the people have been subjected, for it will take time to convert ripened crops into food ready for the table.

The people of the United States and their government are directly and immediately concerned with the food supply of our friends and former allies in Europe. The President has chosen a committee to take all necessary steps to see that the necessary food is assembled in the United States and sent to the nations which need it most. The honorary chairman of the committee, former President Herbert Hoover, has been in Europe for several weeks, investigating at first hand the supply of food. Thus far he has visited France, French North Africa, Italy, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Holland and Germany. He has reported several times on conditions as he has found them, and there is little cause for optimism in his reports. In all countries, Mr. Hoover tells us, the people are living on rations which give them from one-third to two-thirds of the amount of food eaten by the average American.

Let me quote just two sentences from the last report by Mr. Hoover, based on his observations in Switzerland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Finland: I quote:

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The Critical urgency of food needs of Europe cannot be overestimated. Unless the program of the Famine Emergency Committee can be realized, widespread starvation during the next three months is inevitable. That is the end of the quotation from Mr. Hoover.

The people of Europe are hungry, but they can keep alive if they can continue to bring food into their countries. And for that food, they look principally to the United States, for we own the main storehouse of food in the world. The cost of failure to share it would be incalculably bad for us in the future.

Let's sample the situation in some of the countries. In Czechoslovakia, even on very limited rations, the grain supply will run out by the middle of May--and the new grain crop will not be harvested until the middle of August. That means the country will be three months without grain, their principal food crop, unless imported food can tide them over. In Poland, the food situation is so critical that there is fear that much of the grain intended for spring seeding will be eaten for food. The daily ration, already far below our standards, recently has been reduced by 20 percent.

In all of the countries visited by President Hoover, the insidious effects of malnutrition are apparent. Tuberculosis is increasing at an alarming rate. In one country--one child in four dies in infancy. But for the grace of God, which spared our country the ravages of war and drought, it might happen in America. Unless the humanity of Americans is more fully aroused, it will happen on an even greater scale in Europe.

Just two days ago, your government issued its quarterly report on crop conditions in the United States, and on the supplies of farm products on hand.

As President Truman said Thursday, interpreting that report, the present outlook is for improved food conditions as soon as the new crops of 1946 start moving to consumers this summer. Fortunately, crop prospects in this country based

on the condition of winter wheat and the intentions of farmers to plant spring wheat, point to the possibility of another crop of more than one billion bushels.

But realization of those prospects is a colossal gamble.. The outcome depends on the long chance of getting in 1946 our ninth successive year of good crop weather. For the first time in our history, this country had consecutively in 1944 and 1945 two crops of wheat each of which exceeded one billion bushels. Now we are trying for the third crop in a row in this billion bushel category. That the present crop prospects indicate we may get it is a wonder of wonders. But we won't know the real answer to that crop question until the weather gives it in the 10 to 15 weeks ahead.

But the hungry people of the famine countries cannot eat prospects. As President Truman has said, the real pinch is coming in the next 90 days. If people starve to death in this crisis period, the bumper crops that may come later will do them no good.

Unfortunately, the facts of our present supply situation are grim. Supplies of wheat on farms in the United States are shown by the report to total less than 204 million bushels. Because an even lower estimate had been feared, this has been misinterpreted by some people outside the Department of Agriculture as an optimistic report. The real truth is exactly the contrary. This is not in my judgment an optimistic report. The fact is that the farm stocks of wheat are shown to be 34 million bushels below those of last year and the lowest since 1941. All other wheat stocks, including commercial stocks and those in interior mills, elevators and warehouses, also are the lowest in years.

In the face of that situation, we have a goal that was set months ago of exporting 225 million bushels of wheat in the first six months of this year. If anyone should imagine that attainment of that goal will be anything but extremely difficult, his thinking should be set straight by another official government report on the food situation, just issued in Washington by the Department of Agriculture.

The BAE estimates that supplies of wheat available for export in all of the exporting countries fall about 50 percent short of the total requirements of the shortage countries. So we can see clearly that our chance of meeting our export goal depends entirely upon cutting down our consumption of wheat. To meet our export goal, it will be absolutely essential in my opinion, to take effective steps at once to check the heavy feeding of wheat to livestock. And it will be absolutely essential to reduce our own human consumption of wheat. If we do not do these two things I fear we shall fail to meet our export goals.

So it brings us right down to our own food--to the tables in our homes and hotels and restaurants.

Obviously, we must make some reductions, somewhere. We cannot cut down on the amount of grain used for seed this spring. We shall need all the spring wheat that can be planted. Shall we cut down on the 125 million bushels we hope and intend to export? So the question comes right home to us. Shall we continue to eat as much bread as usual, waste as much as usual, while European babies die because their mothers are undernourished? Shall we foster the hatred of European peoples for years to come because we choose to eat while they starve? There can be only one answer: a resounding "no" echoed by every American who is capable of sympathy for his fellow man. No, we cannot, we will not lower our objective in the amount of wheat we propose to ship overseas before the end of June. Even the 125 million bushels we propose to send will not be enough. It will save many lives, but it will not prevent widespread hunger and malnutrition.

To meet the shortcomings in our supply of wheat, the only thing we can do is use less for livestock feed, use less for our own food, and lower our estimates of the amount we shall need to carry over into the next crop year. And it is in our efforts to reduce consumption that our struggle will come. And it will be a struggle. Make no mistake about it.

Consumers, farmers, and manufacturers all are asked to help save grain, especially wheat. Let me list briefly the principal steps that have been taken and the further things the President's Famine Emergency Committee feels must be done to make it possible for us to meet our objective of 125 million bushels of wheat shipped during April, May and June.

First, flour millers have been asked to extract more of the wheat grain as flour. Probably most of you have been eating bread made from the new type flour without noticing any difference. The millers and the manufacturers of livestock feed and other products using grain of any kind are limited in the amount they may have on hand. This is to prevent hoarding of grain, and to help insure fair distribution of supplies. Livestock feeders, also, are limited in the amount of grain supplies they may build up. Farmers are asked to feed their dairy cows and meat animals more economically; and to cut down the number of animals to carefully calculated levels. They are asked to reduce the size of their poultry flocks, so less feed will be required to maintain them. These are all in the interest of saving grain, and making the limited supply do the most good.

The Department of Agriculture recently has inaugurated a plan for buying which wheat/encourages the wheat grower to sell his crop at once and receive payment for it at the market price on some future date of his own choosing. This removes the financial inducements that might encourage the grower to hold onto his wheat. It is out of the northern plains states that most of the wheat must come to fill the box cars and then the ships that will carry food to Europe. North Dakota alone has enough wheat still on farms to make up more than half of the goal of 125 million bushels. South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, and Ohio are other states with appreciable amounts of wheat still on farms. From these states there is a pipeline of rail and ship transportation ready to move grain to hungering lands. Everything possible must be done to keep the pipeline full for the next few weeks until we have sent all the grain we can possibly spare and until our European friends begin to harvest their crops.

The farmer, the livestock feeder, and the processor of grain have a tremendous task ahead of them. But it is no greater than that which faces the consumer. And by consumer, I mean you and me. The others may do all that is necessary to conserve wheat and other grains and still we may fail to reach our objective if consumers do not do their part. And with human lives at stake, we cannot fail.

The thing that is asked of you and me is to cut down on the amount of wheat products that we buy and use, in the form of bread, flour, pastries, spaghetti, and so on. We are asked to do this voluntarily, because it is the only way it can be done in time, and because it is the way most Americans want to do it.

In reducing the amount of bread and other wheat products that we use, we must eliminate waste. No bread must go into the garbage. We can find foods that are more plentiful, such as potatoes, which can be substituted for part of the bread we customarily eat, without hurting our diets in any way. As a nation, we need to eat ^{three} slices of bread instead of five; make every loaf of bread stretch 40 percent farther.

We need to make these savings in bread, and at the same time reduce our consumption of fats and oils, and contribute to the world food supply by growing victory gardens.

The food crisis of today challenges every American not one bit less than the military crisis of the war years. Early in the war, our Commander in Chief set goals for the nation's wartime production, goals so high that many thought they were impossible of achievement. Under his leadership, we proved they were not impossible. As we confront the menace of world hunger, we ^{may} find inspiration in his words from the dark days of the war: We can! We will! We must!

Good night.

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